

Ephesians Week 1
Introduction and 1:1-14
Summary

Introduction

We concluded that, despite difficulties, that this is a letter from Paul the apostle himself to the church in Ephesus, but likely as a circular letter which could be sent to surrounding churches of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The letter is written mainly to gentile Christians, focusing on the main themes of the exalted Christ, the role of the unity of the church, and the demand for holiness on God's people. The letter was likely written during Paul's Roman imprisonment around A.D. 61 - 62.

Ephesians 1:1-14

The letter starts out with the standard criteria. This is a letter from Paul who God has called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. It is written to the church(es) in Ephesus and he blesses them with God's grace and peace which has been bestowed through Christ.

Paul then begins his letter in earnest, beginning with a eulogy, a blessing of God for all the spiritual blessings which God has bestowed on his people. Those blessing are election to holiness, instatement as God's sons and daughters, redemption and forgiveness, the gift of the Spirit and the hope of glory.

These gifts are given in Christ, the Messiah who we are incorporated into, and it is through his death and resurrection that God's purposes are secured. Paul describes that God's purpose is to sum up all creation (heaven and earth) in Christ. And, in Christ we are allotted a portion of all creation as an inheritance as well as we are God's portion (what he takes for himself).

There are two groups of people. There is first are the Jewish Christians, who were the first to hope in Christ, but now also, there are gentile Christians who have responded to the gospel with belief and have been given the Holy Spirit as a pledge that their salvation will be brought to completion.

Important to note through out this section that what occurs, occurs by the will of God the Father who is the subject of all the action (he makes it happen), and it is all done in Christ. And, the overarching purpose of it all is for the praise of God's glory. God is to be glorified for his goodness and his grace which has extended to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the gentile (Romans).

Themes

We noted a few themes:

- i. The exalted Christ. Jesus has been raised to the heavenlies and it is there that we are incorporated in him and where we receive all the spiritual blessings God has bestowed on us.
- ii. Eschatology (study of last things - often understood as end times). In Ephesians there is a lot which we already have received and enjoyed, we are not simply waiting for the return of Christ or the final judgement to receive them. This is not to say there are no places in the letter which anticipates the end to fulfill things, it's just heavier on the 'already' verses the 'not yet', than other NT documents.

- iii. Election, adoption, predestination. These are theologically weighted words, but these are best understood as Israel language that has now been opened up to both Jew and Gentile.
- iv. Unity. This is the big theme of Ephesians, the unity of Jew and Gentile forming the one people of the one God, the one Lord, and the one Spirit.

Theological Application

We talked briefly on how the theology which comes out in this section applies to us today. One thing we noted was that the fact that God elected in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world is not an abstract doctrine. This means that you and I were no mistake. Even before God began the work of creation he had you and I in mind. And, because he elected us and his purposes cannot be frustrated, our salvation is sure. What God has begun to work in us, he is faithful to complete. So, we do not need to be worried about our salvation, though this is not licence to take it for granted, and we do not need to worry about our future - it is firmly in God's hands. In short, God loves us; always has, always will.

Glossary of Terms

Apocrypha: Books from the intertestamental times (also known as second temple Judaism) which were not included in the canon of Jewish or Christian Scriptures, but are still important, particularly to understand the context of the New Testament.

Apostolic Fathers or Early Church Fathers: Church leaders from approximately A.D. 100 - 600.

Canon, Canonical: Collection of books considered as valid for Jewish and/or Christian rule (literally what canon means) of life. It is the canon which is considered Scripture.

Intertestamental: The time between the close of the first Testament (Old Testament) and the second Testament (New Testament). The period is also known as Second Temple Judaism or early Judaism. This period traces Israel coming back to Jerusalem and surrounding areas but continuing to be under Pagan rule, except for a short time when they are independent, but ultimately coming back under foreign rule, i.e. Rome.

Pseudepigrapha: The term is used to describe those Jewish writings which were excluded from the OT canon and which find no place in the Apocrypha. These are also important as background to the New Testament.

Pseudonymity: The practice of attributing literary works (like Ephesians) to assumed names.